S-35 – Epidemics as Technologies 1 - Technospaces of Epidemics

International Committee for the History of Technology

Organizers:
1) Catarina Caetano da Rosa, (Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany), cdr@ifs.tu-darmstadt.de
2) Anne Rasmussen, (University of Strasbourg, France), anne.rasmussen@unistra.fr
3) Nils Kessel, (Institut Francilien Innovation Recherche Société - IFRIS, France), nils.kessel@gmx.de

Abstract:
Epidemics are recurrent phenomena in history. They transgress borders, move across time and space and affect different forms of life – both literally and metaphorically. Each epidemic disease poses specific challenges to societies such as Zika today. Hence, epidemic diseases and threats are perfectly suited for being analyzed in a global history perspective.

The scholarship on the history of epidemics is rich. Whereas many studies come out of the history of medicine and the social and political sciences, the proposed panel session aims at examining epidemic diseases (such as typhoid, cholera and yellow fever) explicitly from the perspective of the history of technology. Thus, two dimensions will be analyzed: The relationship of the discourses about epidemic threats and the technical measures taken to confine them.

While historical scholarship on epidemic practices is often focusing on local or national experiences with epidemics, many studies on epidemic discourses are either focusing on the nation-state or are geographically poorly situated. In this panel, we would like to bridge this gap by analysing discourses and technology-based practices in conjunction with each other.

Technology is considered in a broad sense as an ensemble of tools embedded both in discourses and actions taken to prevent, attenuate, control or eradicate life threats. On the one hand, a metaphorical way of speaking about epidemics can often be observed. On the other hand, interventions depicted as improvements such as the upgrading of sanitarian infrastructures, the introduction of quarantine measures, the intensification of legal sanctions and the development and distribution of drugs are put into operation. Therefore, the session seeks to examine and discuss the interrelationship between epidemics and technology by focusing on various periods, geographical foci, epidemics, and technologies.

Keywords: History of Technology – Epidemics – Technospaces – Medical science – Sanitation.

Participants:
- Catarina Caetano da Rosa
- Rasmussen Anne
- Vagneron Frédéric
- Nils Kessel, Anne Kveim Lie
- Mark Honigsbaum
- Ivan Lind Christensen
- Michael Zeheter
- Fritz Dross
- Claas Kirchhelle